

Pelican Island

National Wildlife Refuge

Photo: USFWS



Photo: Paul Tritaik



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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1903.
- Acres: 5,000.
- Located: Indian River County, FL.
- Officially the first refuge.
- Other management: lease with Florida for open waters and islands, conservation easement and/or management agreement with water management district and mosquito control district for impoundments; management agreement with Bureau of Land Management and Indian River County for uplands.
- Location: the refuge is located in the Indian River Lagoon just south of Sebastian Inlet, north of the Wabasso Causeway and east of Intracoastal Waterway. The nearest community is Sebastian located near the western boundary of the refuge.
- Administered by Merritt Island NWR.

Financial Impacts of Refuge

- One-person staff.
- 40,000 annual visitors.

Refuge Objectives

- Protect the historic rookery on Pelican Island.
- Protect, enhance and restore marsh and lagoon habitat for migratory birds.
- Provide habitat for threatened and endangered species.
- Protect Pelican Island as a National Historic Landmark and National Wilderness Area.
- Increase public understanding through outreach, interpretation, environmental education and compatible recreation.

Management Tools

- Outreach/education.
- Law enforcement.
- Mechanical/chemical control of exotic plants.
- Partnerships.
- Cooperating association.
- Newsletter.

Public Use Opportunities

- Boat tours.
- Fishing.
- Wildlife observation.
- Photography.

Calendar of Events

March: Annual Anniversary Celebration.

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week.

Questions and Answers

Where is it?

Pelican Island is located in Indian River Lagoon east of Sebastian, Florida.

Can I see it?

You can view it two ways. From Riverview Park in Sebastian, look southeast across the open water. It is located about 1.5 miles away, but even from this distance you can usually see large groups of birds on the island. The second way is by boat. Several companies in Sebastian offer excursions to the island. The cost is between \$8-\$10.

Do you have any facilities?

At this time, no. However, a plan has been prepared to develop several facilities which will allow the public to see historic Pelican Island. The facilities will be built on the east side of the refuge off Jungle Trail. Plans call for a viewing tower, information kiosk, restrooms and trails.

Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge

Is this really the first National Wildlife Refuge?

Yes. President Theodore Roosevelt set aside Pelican Island as a preserve and breeding ground for native birds on March 14, 1903. Plume hunters, egg collectors and vandals had exterminated all the egrets, herons and spoonbills from the island in the 1800's. Paul Kroegel (first refuge worker) protected the remaining brown pelicans and petitioned ornithologists and naturalists to help him. At the urging of the Florida Audubon Society and the American Ornithologists Union, President Roosevelt acted to protect Pelican Island and subsequently many other wildlife areas that were to become the National Wildlife Refuge System, the world's largest and most diverse assemblage of lands for wildlife.